



# Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools

July-August 2013

An e-newsletter from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
to promote family-school-community partnerships for children's learning

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## *Family-Friendly Checklists to Start the School Year*

### **School Tools to Gauge Family Engagement**

The countdown to start the 2013-14 school year has begun and, as with any good countdown, a checklist of must-haves helps. Following are a variety of checklists and other instruments to make sure your staff and school are ready to welcome families and use parents' considerable knowledge to make this a great year of learning for children.

Download a checklist and ask staff to complete it together, as a way of starting productive discussions about family engagement:

- [Parent-Friendly Schools: Starting the Conversation](#) features five brief checklists for school improvement teams to gauge how their school creates a welcoming climate, links parents to student learning, bridges cultures, supports parents as advocates, and involves parents in decision making. From the book, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, by Anne Henderson et al.
- [Family Engagement Checklist in PBIS](#) evaluates the level of family engagement in the school's PBIS program. From the Wisconsin PBIS Network.
- The [Family Engagement for High School Success Toolkit](#) offers checklists and tables to help high schools plan and implement family engagement that supports the pathway to graduation for at-risk students (see pp. 78 to 100). From United Way Worldwide and Harvard Family Research Project.
- [Measuring Your Family-School-Community Partnerships](#) serves as a tool to help schools identify areas of strength and improvement-needed in how they reach out to families.
- The [Classroom Family Engagement Rubric](#) provides teachers with a clear picture of what effective family engagement looks like in the classroom through concrete descriptions of how teachers demonstrate strong family engagement through their conversations and daily practice. From the Flamboyant Foundation and Harvard Family Research Project.
- After-school programs may want to use the [Family Engagement Strategy Checklist](#) in the Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time Programs Toolkit, published by the Build the Out-of-School Time Network.

Does your school use other checklists to improve family engagement? Please let us know!

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## *Parent Resources on the Common Core State Standards*

Use the following resources to answer parents' questions about the CCSS:

- **Top 10 Things Parents Need to Know about the Common Core State Standards:** <http://www.msde.state.md.us/w/Top10CCSSParents.pdf>. A one-page handout for parents from Maryland Public Schools.
- **Council of the Great City Schools Parent Roadmaps:** <http://www.cgcs.org/domain/36>. Information about what children will learn in math and English language arts K-8 by grade level and subject in English and Spanish.
- **National PTA Parent Guides for Student Success:** <http://www.pta.org/4446.htm>. Grade-level guides for K-8 and high school for English language arts and mathematics (English and Spanish).
- **Engage NY Shifts for Students and Parents:**
  - <http://www.engageny.org/resource/shifts-for-students-and-parents> Steps parents can take to improve their child's learning. Available in several languages.
  - <http://www.engageny.org/parent-and-family-resources> A video and toolkit for parents and families explaining how the CCSS will prepare students for college and careers.
- **Education Northwest Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards:** What do Parents Need to Know? <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/1547> Explains in English and Spanish the benefits of CCSS and what can parents do to help students prepare.

Visit the DPI CCSS website for more information: [http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn\\_ccss](http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn_ccss).

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## *Use New District Report Cards to Engage Families*

### **Schools do better when districts guide efforts**

Wisconsin's first District Report Cards are due to be published online in mid-September, offering districts a sterling opportunity to engage families in district-wide school improvement. Districts send a strong message when they support family engagement efforts and view school-family partnerships as central to school improvement, according to Joyce Epstein, director of the National Network of Partnership Schools. Recent studies show "if district leaders help schools develop their programs, the schools do better than if left on their own," Epstein said.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is expected to release District Report Cards along with the state's School Report Cards. The District Report Cards will be very similar to the School Report Cards but will treat the district as if it were "one big school" responsible for all students in the district.

Use the District Report Card to inform families about the strengths of student learning in the district as well as challenges facing the district. Following are some links to useful resources and ideas for using the new District Report Card to get valuable feedback from families on improving student learning, attendance, and establishing positive, child-centered relationships among families and school staff:

- ➡ Hold a district-wide [parent forum](#) to explain District Report Cards to parents, to share the district's goals and actions, and to hear parents' ideas about actions the district can take to engage families in improving learning in the district.
- ➡ Hold small-group information sharing-and-listening sessions, such as before-school coffees or grade-level classroom suppers for parents to learn about how school and classroom learning goals

impact district goals. Small-group settings are a great way to hear from parents how the district can support their efforts to help their child learn.

- ➡ Have a [Data-Sharing Workshop](#) for parents that explains how district, school, classroom, and student data drive school improvement. Personalize the workshop by offering parents data on their child's classroom and identifying specific strategies they can take to help their child meet goals.
- ➡ Feature columns in the district newsletter and website that inform parents about the District Report Card and offer channels for families to reply with their questions, comments, and ideas for improving learning.
- ➡ Recruit [parent leaders](#) who mirror their communities to conduct [home visits](#) and information sessions that both present district information and solicit parent feedback.
- ➡ Work with already-established parent groups, such as PTA/PTO, special education, Title I, after-school program, and [ELL](#) to spread information and get parent feedback.
- ➡ [Survey parents](#) about their level of knowledge, comfort, and willingness to be involved in district improvement efforts. Offer computer stations at busy community locations – libraries, clinics, and marketplaces – so families without Internet access at home can take a district parent survey. Be sure to publicize the results of the survey!

Epstein also advises districts to develop a cadre of school staff with expertise on family-school-community partnerships. Then, district leaders can guide schools as they organize [partnership action teams](#) and develop plans to strengthen partnerships.

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## *Parents Positive on Use of Mobile Devices for Learning*

### **But want educators' advice**

Parents need educators' help figuring out how to use mobile devices to enhance student learning. A 2013 study done for the Learning First Alliance and AT&T, [What Parents Think About Mobile Devices for Early Childhood and K–12 Learning](#), recommended that schools offer authoritative information and advice to parents and students on how to make better use of mobile devices and apps for learning, rather than for entertainment only, and how to use them safely by grade level.

The study of 2,400 families found that the vast majority of students have an array of ever-changing technology and mobile devices at home. Not surprisingly, parents of “super users” and of children whose schools required them to use technology at school were the most positive about the potential of these devices for learning.

The study also recommended that schools take a needs-based approach and provide devices only for students who do not have them, ensuring that students' access is as equal as possible. Only one in five students use no mobile or portable devices (i.e., smartphones, iPods , laptops, e-readers, and notebooks).

Other findings include:

- Half of all high school students carry a smartphone with them to school every day.
  - 16 percent of K-12 parents report that their child's school allows them to use a family-owned device—or BYOD — for classroom learning (24% of high school parents).
  - 17 percent of K-12 parents say that their child's school requires using a mobile or portable device in the classroom.
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## *Phone-in conversation: Using Technology to Engage Families*

Family-Friendly Schools offers a free, monthly phone-in discussion on a family engagement topic. On August 21, the firm will discuss how schools can use technology to help increase family engagement, from online report cards and social media, to virtual parent meetings and connecting through text and email. Visit [www.familyfriendlyschools.com](http://www.familyfriendlyschools.com) for more information.

Newsletter developed by DPI Title I and School Support team staff: **Ruth Anne Landsverk**, partnerships coordinator; **Kristine Nadolski**, VISTA project coordinator; **Michael Hickey**, VISTA leader.

The **Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools** is a monthly newsletter of news, events, research, and promising practices to keep Wisconsin schools and districts focused and moving forward on family-school-community partnerships for children's learning. You are receiving this e-brief because of your involvement in a partnership-related event or initiative sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Your comments, ideas, and stories are vital to this newsletter. Please tell us your achievements in promoting children's learning with families and community members, as well as your challenges and questions. Partnership practitioners learn most from each other, so **let's hear from you!**

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